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ABSTRACT

This paper explores teacher roles and advocates a type of teacher leadership that stimulates change and empowers those they lead. Citing changes in visions of leadership in business circles and the many recent attempts to reform education that have met with resistance, the paper notes that teachers, rather than advocating change, are generally resistant to change. The paper argues that if teachers recast themselves as leaders, they would be better able to resist isolation, feel a commitment to their community, and be more professionally active in shaping the education world. The paper cites research on teachers' perceptions of their peers who are leaders which found that such teacher-leaders are hard working and involved with innovation, can motivate students from a variety of abilities, make themselves available to other teachers, and sponsor extracurricular activities for students enthusiastically. The paper urges teachers to set aside the didactic teaching methods of the past and become guides or coaches. Leadership methods must be taught in teacher education courses. It encourages teachers to lay aside their ambivalence about leadership and take seriously their leadership role with their students and their peers. (Contains 18 references.) (JB)

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TEACHERS AS LEADERS: HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

by

Timothy Mooney

Whether we care to admit it or not, we, as teachers, are leaders. At minimum, we are the leaders of our classrooms. The question is what kind of leaders are we? To go a little further, a more pertinent question might be: What kind of leader do we want to be? This introspection, as will be shown, is essential for a person to become an effective teacher and leader. True leaders are change agents, because if there is no change, no movement, why do we need leaders? Leading implies movement: Without it, leaders become managers or figureheads.

A serious discussion of teachers as leaders must include a discussion of the following: an understanding of leadership; the present structure of school leadership; how reform is viewed and how it affects teachers; why teachers must become leaders of change; and, finally, what the future may hold for teachers as leaders.

Leadership, like most things in the world, is an evolving concept. The effective leader in yesterday's society would most likely be ineffective today. The leader of the past could be typified as a forceful individual, a boss, a tyrant. The power and control usually rested on the shoulders of the man sitting behind the biggest desk in the biggest office on the top floor of the enterprise. Similarly, there is the manager that coordinates the employees and materials of an organization.[1] These people, though they still exist, are becoming endangered species. These are the transactional leaders who, Goodlad says, " (are) a pragmatic power broker who seeks to convince workers that their needs will be met if and when the organization's needs are met."[2] Businesses are finally recognizing the truth of the old adage, "Two heads are better than one." Slow to follow the lead of business, education is starting to recognize the same truth. Collaborative learning and teaching are on the rise; "we" is better than" I".

Following the lead of many Japanese and European businesses, Americans in business have started to move toward a different kind of leadership: transformational. This leader is less interested in power relationships, but more in achieving the goals of the organization. They use their position to persuade others to work toward the mutually agreed upon goals of the organization.[3] Rather than being the traditional top-down management, this is more bottom-up management. The workers have some control over their jobs with an effect on their working environment. Many schools are looking into Deming's Total Quality Management model to see if they can adapt it to their needs. . This requires the people involved at all levels to take an active role in decision making (Schenkat, 1993).

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This is a particular challenge to principals who face the hostility of teachers who have experienced wave after wave of educational reform over the years. Like most people, teachers are resistant to change. Why should they buy into a new paradigm, when there will be a new one next year? The history of education is littered with the carcasses of movements that have either failed, or have fallen out of favor and are waiting to be revived.

Since the 1980's, there has been a movement to reform education. It is not the first, nor will it be the last. Education, as exemplified in the Chicago Public Schools, has become an unyielding bureaucracy. This is a reflection of the society that created it, one of top-down management. That society is changing, to survive, education must change with it. These changes can be seen in the way our country is governed. Before President Clinton, with a few exceptions, it would have been unthinkable for a sitting president to hold town hall meetings to see what the populace felt about a given issue. Yet that is exactly what Clinton is doing. There are not only town hall meetings, but also electronic bulletin boards on which the citizens can E-mail their thoughts and concerns to the president. Nothing like this exists in most school systems.

The country is calling for a reform of education because the system no longer meets the needs of its clients. However, the word "reform" and its corollary "restructure" cause problems. It implies that one will take what already exists and reshape it into something new. This is not what is needed; what is needed is more of a transformation, a metamorphosis into something totally new. Goodlad, in his book, A Place Called School advocates such a change. He would change the entire system. Among other things, he would alter the ages when students enter and leave school and how those students' needs would be met. But, none of this will be achieved without the cooperation of teachers. (Goodlad, 1984).

As noted earlier, many teachers are resistant to change. This is a very human response; most people fear the unknown. It is much safer to remain within the realm of the known. Venturing into the unknown holds untold horrors, which is why so many teachers hold so tenaciously onto the things they know work. Whether or not we, as teachers, change, the world around us is going to change. This is why we must become "change agents" or leaders, to have some control over the changes in education. Having teachers as leaders does not mean that teachers would replace the principal as the head of the school. Patterson states, "...leaders may become followers, and followers may become leaders. Roles are not fixed."[4]

This idea of changeable roles is important. For education to escape the eternal calls for reform, change must be built into the system. Both administrators and teachers must become accustomed to self-reflection and, perhaps, constant change. If there is constant change, or even the opportunity for constant change, there would be no need for restructuring or reform because it would be happening all of the time. Holzman examines the meaning of "systemic change." Two things he points out are particularly important: that this sort of change must be systematic, and it must be fundamental. If change is to be systematic, those involved must think about what changes are to be carried out and all of the other implications that might result from the change being put into action. For a change to be

fundamental, he believes that we must move beyond the system we already have.[5] This brainstorming process, by nature, must include all possibilities, however absurd they may seem. Once the ideas are in the open, they can be accepted or rejected.

In the past, most educational reform has come in the shape of edicts from on high, administrators telling the teachers what program they want them to carry out. For a transformation of education as we know it to happen, teachers must be involved in its reshaping, or "bottom-up" management. When teachers become involved in the decision-making process, they become empowered. There is a feeling of having more control over processes that they now feel powerless over, such as, fiscal policy and personnel decisions.[6] Teachers are supposed to be professionals. They have a specialized body of knowledge and are supposed to be able to direct their own labor, yet most of their decisions are made for them.[7] This is a principal reason teachers must become leaders, but there are other, equally important reasons.

Some schools can be seen in the context of being a "settled culture." That is, they exist in stable communities that offer widespread support. Others are more unstable, existing in what could be viewed as a "frontier culture." To survive in the rough, dangerous environment of the frontier culture, people must gather together for sustenance and security.[8] So, teachers must assume the mantle of leadership, but also be ready to take off the mantle when the time is appropriate, when one of their colleagues is more able to assume it. This will help build a community, instead of an organization. Each member of the community will be empowered, knowing their contribution will be valued.

As anyone who has taught could say, teaching is an isolating profession. When a teacher enters their room, they are cut off from interacting with other adults. Each teacher holds sway in their room, usually contacting other teachers when entering or leaving the building or for a brief time in the lunchroom.[9] By becoming a leader, teachers would be obligated to share their insights, successes, and failures with others.[10] This interaction with others energizes both the speaker and the listener. As a member of the Chicago Area Writing Project, I have experienced this flow of energy. One no longer feels that they are the only one that has a particular problem or success. It also allows the teacher to get valuable information and advice that might not otherwise be available.

Becoming a leader, teachers also become more committed to the community they are trying to build. This resolve makes it more likely that any change contemplated will actually be tried. When the idea is tried, it is also more likely that the teacher will do anything necessary to make the change succeed.[11] Even if the concept does not work, the teacher would be more likely to reflect on what went wrong and what could be done to affect the change. Building this community is the hard part. One must start the process alone, but often will find that others will join when they see that positive things are happening.

Without a vision, the teacher may be leading their colleagues across the trackless desert. This seems to be what happened in the past. Administrators and others chose paths to take without considering where they were going. While

stating an overt purpose, they did not take into regard the consequences of their actions. The teachers making decisions about what they are trying see almost immediate results, and can make adjustments if the strategy does not work. For example, to get students interested in reading, I began reading a mystery novel to a Freshman English class. A few of the students were interested, but most of the class felt that by reading aloud to them, I was treating the class like elementary students. Since I give my students some autonomy over what happens in the classroom, we took a vote and the class voted to have me stop reading. This contrasts with the Creative Writing class I teach, where we are now almost finished with the novel, and the class protests if I do not read to them. A teacher that did not reflect on the effectiveness of their methods might still be reading to the Freshman class.

Who are these teachers that are leaders? Wilson polled more than 400 teachers to learn what qualities other teachers felt made leaders of their comrades. She came up with the following characteristics: (1) Hard-working and involved with innovation; (2) The ability to motivate students from a variety of abilities and backgrounds by using creative methods; (3) They make themselves available to other teachers as a resource or advocate; and (4) They sponsor extracurricular activities for students enthusiastically.[12] These people compare favorably to innovative leaders in the business world. She cites Kouzes and Posner as seeing:

> ...leaders *challenge the process* because they are risk-takers....They *inspire a vision*. Since they like teamwork and instinctively nurture the talent and energy of colleagues, leaders *enable others to act*. Leaders are role-models and planners who *model the way*. By serving as coaches and cheerleaders, they *encourage the heart*. (Author's emphasis)[13]

Wilson continues that while most of these teachers identified are excellent leaders of students, they are hesitant to become leaders of other teachers, although those other teachers already see them as leaders. Part of the problem, as she sees it, is that most of these teachers do not like the trappings or the manners of leaders.[14] In other words, they are usually quiet rebels who let others bask in glory, leading by example instead of words and mandates.

Where should these teachers lead us? One area teachers can make an impact in is curriculum. We are, after all, the delivery system for it: why shouldn't we have a voice in what we teach? Two current systems being implemented by schools, Outcome-Based Education and Total Quality Management, almost require teachers to take a more active role in what is being taught. Teachers are being asked to ascertain what outcomes are to be met by the students on exit from school. The issues that need to be considered include the following: How do we want the students to look when they leave? What do we want them to do or know after they have left the school? Though the outcomes reflect a shared decision, that decision is reached by a concensus of teachers and administrators. The outcomes are not commands about what to teach. In fact, according to the

Monsons, they should be "stated in such a way as to encourage individual interpretation and innovation on the part of the teacher."[15] Teachers, as stated earlier, need this autonomy to feel like the professionals they are.

In their own classrooms, teachers also need to embrace Patterson's vision of the leaders of the future. They need to set aside the didactic teaching methods of the past and become more of a coach or guide. The same principles that apply to teachers also apply to students. If students are to feel the same empowerment teachers want, they must also be give some autonomy in the classroom. This surrendering of power on the teacher's part is an example of being an appropriate role model. As a teacher who is using this approach, I must say that one of the biggest hurdles to this method is convincing the students that I am totally serious about them deciding how we, as a class, will reach the outcomes. Once the disbelief is overcome, the students become active participants, and most of them become more involved in their own learning. A final obstacle that I have yet to overcome is letting the students decide how they will be assessed. Another teacher, more adventurous than myself, has taken that step and reports that, even though they had not covered all of the required material, her students did just as well on department-mandated, criterion-referenced tests.[16]

More and more, teachers are being asked to evaluate their fellow teachers. Some of these changes have been dictated by union agreements to protect members from surprise or "walk through" evaluations. Some schools are following this trend voluntarily. This moves the evaluation from the realm of possibly being punitive, into a more nurturing role.[17] People, by nature, all have areas in which they are weak; teachers, being people, are no different. By having another teacher observe, in a post-visit conference, the two could engage in a meaningful conversation where both parties could explore what happened in the classroom. This helps break the isolation of all teachers. In a school where this has been tried, the principal stated, "...teachers had taught next to each other for years, yet this was their first chance to actually see one another in action."[18] Evaluation, in this model, moves from a negative experience into an opportunity for peer coaching. An important part of the writing process is peer evaluation. Both the writer and the peer editor gain from the interaction. This is a lesson that moves from the classroom into administration.

For teachers to be leaders in the future, it is imperative that the methods this paper has explored begin to be taught in the teacher education courses of the nation and begin to be reflected in the administrations of schools. Since most of us teach in the way we were taught, colleges must rethink their own methods. Too often, I have sat in a college classroom being told of innovative methods that I should use in the classroom in a didactic manner. I once worked in a school where the administration pushed cooperative learning as the way of the future by lecturing for over an hour. If both colleges and administrations would abandon the "Do as I say, not as I do" philosophy, more teachers would be willing to become leaders, not just in the classroom, but in the school as a whole.

So, teacher leaders need to set aside their reservations about being a leader. Since many of them are already seen by their colleagues as leaders, they

need to take their role seriously. If we are ever going to be able to move away from the bureaucratic octopus that is now education, there must be teachers willing to take on the decision-making process. Perhaps, the colleges will begin teaching, or, better yet, mentoring the students now in teacher preparation programs to be able to practice some of the leadership skills mentioned.

Endnotes

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2. John I. Goodlad, Teachers for Our Nation's Schools, The Jossey-Bass Education Series and The Jossey-Bass Higher Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), 138.

3. Patterson, 3; Goodlad, 139

4. Ibid., Patterson, 3.

5. Michael Holzman, "What *Is* Systemic Change?", Educational Leadership 51, no. 1 (September 1993): 18.

6. John I. Goodlad, A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future, (New York: MacGraw-Hill Book Company, 1984), 188-190.

7. John Murphy, "What's In? What's Out? American Education in the Nineties," Phi Delta Kappan 74, no. 8 (April 1993), p.645.

8. Douglas E. Mitchell and Sharon Tucker, "Leadership as a Way of Thinking," Educational Leadership 49, no. 5 (February 1992): 32.

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10. Thomas J. Sergiovanni, "Why We Should Seek Substitutes for Leadership," Educational Leadership 49, no. 5 (February 1992): 42-43.

11. Robert Evans, "The Human Face of Reform," Educational Leadership 51, no. 1 (September 1993): 22.

12. Meena Wilson, "The Search for Teacher Leaders," Educational Leadership, 50, no. 6 (March 1993), 24.

13. ibid., Wilson, 24, citing J.M. Kouzes and B.Z. Posner, The Leadership Challenge: How to Get Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).

14. Ibid., Wilson, 25-27.

15. Michele Pahl Monson and Robert J. Monson, "Who Creates Curriculum? New Roles fo Teachers," Educational Leadership, 51, no. 2 (October 1993), 20-21.

16. Katy Smith, "Becoming the 'Guide on the Side,'" Educational Leadership, 51, no. 2 (October 1993), 37.

17. Susan Black, "How Teachers Are Reshaping Evaluation Procedures," Educational Leadership, 51, no. 2 (October 1993), 38-39.

18. Joanne Rooney, "Teacher Evaluation: No More 'Super'vision," Educational Leadership, 51, no. 2 (October 1993), 44.

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